



Series Book Two
Third Edition

Building Emotionally Realistic Characters



Cate Russell-Cole

Building Emotionally Realistic Characters

Four Dimensional Characterisation Series

Third Edition

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
An Example of How Not to Write.....	6
Change and Motivation	8
Healing from Emotional Trauma.....	9
Grief	11
Shock	13
Super-Egos and Insecurity	15
Fear and Escapism	17
Well Intentioned, but Grossly Misguided: Decisions Gone Awry	19
Phobias	21
Shame	23
Anger and Violence	25
Making Personalities Realistic: The Enneagram as a Tool for Writers	27
Suicide	30
Which Mental Illness is Which? Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder	33
Why We Repeat Past, Negative Behaviour.....	35
Writing Factually About Adoption.....	37
Character Growth: Achieving Realism by Using Stepping Stone Transformations	40
How to Mess Up Your Character's Memory	42
Emotions and Character Traits Which Can Be Used Positively	43
Controlling How Much of YOU Appears in Your Fiction.....	44
About the Author	45
Other Publications by Cate Russell-Cole	45

Introduction

I love the Comedian Jimeoin. He appeals to me because of his cheeky grin and because he talks about everyday things you wouldn't have noticed otherwise. For example, no matter what knife you use to cut through a block of cheese, the knives always slow down to the same speed. Jimmy calls this "the speed of cheese," and quite rightly believes that like the speed of light, it should be a formal unit of measurement... but for slowness.

Whether you are writing fiction, memoir, poetry, short stories, plays, screenplays or music, the ability of your work to touch others depends on how they relate to the messages you are conveying. What they see and hear must be something they have encountered and can relate to easily; or it must be shared in another way they can grasp. Often that is done through the only common element every human being has: knowing what emotions feel like.

You can read a story about events that have never happened to you, but still laugh or cry over what is occurring with the characters. Why? Because you know what it is to experience pain, joy, fear, rejection, envy, fatigue, laughter, grief, ecstasy or doubt too. This is the magic that makes stories work. The tricky part, is conjuring up the right spell or your reader will not be fooled.

This e-book is a full of the incantations you need to bring your characters to life in a way that is emotionally realistic. There are no short cuts to "happily ever after" endings, which leave your plot line hollow and sounding fake. The book contains introductory level psychology which will give you an insight into how emotions and events weave us together into a whole or hurting person. It is not a how-to-write manual, which gives poor and excellent examples of useage; it is a behaviour reference book. You can start reading from any chapter, as the need arises.

This is the second book in the Four Dimensional Characterisation Series. The Four Dimensional Characterisation Series has been written to give writers an insight into the psychology that can be used to build characters and plot lines. It will assist you in building in personality traits and behaviour patterns that make them realistic, unique and believable.

People are at least four dimensional. We have our three dimensional physical form, which you can describe in terms of:

- How people look: hair, eye colour, height, preferred clothing.
- Mannerisms such as sitting a certain way, nodding frequently when listening, nervous habits.
- How they smell: do they regularly use tobacco, cook with garlic or use a signature cologne.
- What their voice, cough, sneeze, singing or laugh sounds like.
- Problematic or distinctive characteristics such as oily hair, dry skin or uneven ears.

The fourth, and mostly unseen dimension, is their positive or negative life experiences that replay in their subconscious mind, motivating their behaviour and driving their emotions.

This dimension is what produces most patterns and most people don't even realise that they exhibit these patterns or what is really behind them. As a writer, this gives you a great plot line as your characters can either find themselves or get more lost along the way. You have more room for explorative narratives.

I hope this series gives you a wealth of ideas to use to enhance your craft.



Disclaimer

This book contains very brief, non-clinical introductions to the conflict and conflict resolution. It is in no way meant to be used as advice or guidance in how to get through any personal psychological / emotional or spiritual issues you have had, or are now experiencing. No liability will be accepted for your use of this material for any purpose, or any of the material on the linked web sites. Please consider what you read carefully, seek additional professional advice and make up your own mind.

In addition, this book is written in Australian English which means spelling will differ from American standards in many places.

Thank you.

An Example of How Not to Write

Have you ever fallen in love with a movie, then had it's writers break your heart? I picked up "Thor: The Dark World" a few months ago and started swooning over the images of Asgard. I had been looking for location ideas for my novel, The Dragon Tree and Asgard's sets nailed it. I haven't been able to find anything comparable, anywhere.

I also got caught up in the storyline. It had seemingly well-developed characters, science meeting magic, great special effects: and yes, I could have done without the needless violence, silly costumes (a Norse goddess in Roman battledress, ancient pre-history beings in spaceships etc.) but, on the whole, it wasn't too bad for a money spinner. So I did what was suggested and bought the first movie in the series, so I understood the background. (There are no spoilers in this chapter for either movie.)

Dear Lord have mercy! It destroyed it. They had not even painted the wood in one set twice, so the grain was showing through on something that was supposed to be made of gold. OK, Marvel is out to make money. They produce hyper-active blockbusters and a great deal of merchandise for a quick buck. None of the Norse Eddas get any story details to match in a cohesive manner, so Marvel could very well do what they pleased. Fair call. A modern twist on a very old tale.

BUT...

... War obsessed, arrogant, rebellious, loud-mouthed, egocentric gods do not turn into fully reformed, sweethearts in under forty-eight hours. Seriously! I can suspend some disbelief in the name of good entertainment, but that one point, that is why I write books with promos which state: "don't take shortcuts which result in hollow characters, fake plot lines and with short cuts to "happily ever after" endings. Your audience will gag. You will never get a second chance to win them back.

I researched where it all went wrong for Marvel and the consensus on the poor character development, seemed to be that Marvel places the emphasis on plot: not character development. There must be many mysterious lose ends which create a "wow" effect when they are tied up; the pace must be so fast there is no time; violence is golden; and character motivation is irrelevant, as people will automatically assume that the good guys just plain work for good, and the bad for bad. Thus no further information is needed. The bad guys always turn good, so problem solved. (Not!) They need a reason to change or keep putting themselves at risk.

Have you experienced that point where your story takes off on it's own path, as the psyche and needs of your protagonist, force their way through? That is how it is supposed to be. Character personality, weaknesses and strengths, motivation, needs and conflicts drive story: not clever, complicated plots!

Had Marvel found a fast way to show that Thor had worked with Jane as a human, for say, a month, I would have bought the change. If only they had flashed up overlaid text saying "One month later..." and cut into showing him doing some menial job with pleasure. That is solid. How hard is that? (I am only picking on one element here, there are a few which are just dreadfully done.)

Consider this:

1. If you have someone who just lost a significant other: they will take time to grieve, not be over it completely in the next chapter with no emotional residue. Research the grief process and weave it in.
2. Warriors who fight frequently, or for long periods DO suffer shellshock, post traumatic post syndrome and anxiety disorders; or they become hard and nasty loners. Weave it in.
3. People don't just snap out of major shocks (for example, a change in the way they thought the world was, or the shock of attack, accident etc.) Understand how shock works and weave it in.

That is what I wrote this book for, to stop us from writing like Marvel. Please use it and save your readership from throwing their iPad across the room in disgust.

P.S. I still love Asgard. Oh and by the way, if you have ever wondered why they have joined so many super heroes together in the Avengers, it's because Marvel owns the rights and can do whatsoever it wants. Those super heroes that don't get included, are not owned by Marvel. It all comes down to money, not story. You're not surprised either, are you?



Chapter Challenge

List the worst examples of short-cut, cheat endings that you have seen in books and movies. What would you have done to rectify the mistakes that were made by the writer/s?

Change and Motivation

This only needs to be a short chapter, as it's really this simple at its base.

Many people will only make lasting, effective changes in their lives, when the pain of staying the way they are becomes too much.

Think about it. How many unfulfilled diets, exercise regimes, job changes, relationship promises and New Years resolutions are out there? Unless we are self-motivated, staying where we are is just too comfy. We don't move until it hurts, or we're backed into a corner. It's one of the most basic principles of human behaviour, but hard to recognise. You've heard the term, "they need to have a bomb put under them?" It moves them as it will hurt, right? Sometimes, that is what it takes.



Chapter Challenge

What kind of unbearable pain could you bestow upon your characters, to make them change their eating habits, career choice; or halt an addiction such as binge eating, alcohol or an Internet addiction? Think past the obvious. Which option will build a greater richness of depth into your work?

If you get stuck with this, list the most painful life events you can think of and see if they may apply.

Alternatively, what rewards are so great, your characters would do anything at all, to attain them?

Healing from Emotional Trauma

How do you heal emotional trauma? Wounds don't necessarily get better with time. Sometimes they just get worse. In medicine, put simply, there are two general types of wounds: superficial and deep. Superficial is skin surface or a little deeper. There is a small injury which time will heal. The deep wounds are the ones that can go down, literally, to the bone. In an environment where there is no light, fresh air or positive outside influence, infections set in and serious complications occur. You get a temperature, feel pain and it doesn't get better unless action is taken. Does that sound like you feel after being the victim of something nasty? Hot under the collar, hurt and left limping?

Not everyone who goes through depression or major trauma will develop long-term debilitating problems. After surviving serious psychological stresses and traumas, a majority of people experience post traumatic growth. It doesn't happen quickly, but the process of working through grief and trauma can have benefits that will positively colour the rest of your life.

Researchers Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) were among the first to research post traumatic growth. While at first people may show high stress signs and be depressed or overwhelmed by what they have been through, in time they can grow to come through with:

- "Increased perception of competence and self-reliance.
- Enhanced acceptance of one's vulnerability and negative emotional experiences.
- Improved relationships with significant others.
- Increased compassion and empathy for others.
- Greater efforts directed at improving relationships.
- Increased appreciation of own existence.
- Greater appreciation for life.
- Positive changes in one's priorities.
- Stronger religious/spiritual beliefs.
- Greater personal intimacy with God.
- Greater sense of control and security through belief in God.
- Greater meaning about life and suffering through religion."

So how do we heal these injuries so we can move forward?

- Recognise the offence has taken place.
- Talk it out with someone you can trust (not the one holding the sword), or journal it out. Say how you feel, why it was unfair etc. and get it out of your system.
- Let go of the infectious emotions you are holding onto: anger, bitterness, resentment, jealousy etc. See them as the destructive forces they are and move

on. At this point, if you have journalled out your feelings, you may want to burn that as a ceremonial letting go.

- Move away from negative people or social media that are reinforcing your pain or adding additional hurts.
- Do something for yourself that will build your self-esteem back up.
- Remember to laugh, play with your creative media and find the joy again.

I wish the answer came as simply as taking a pain killer and the problem is solved! As with any hurt, it is not an easy process. However, the more you practice shunning the negative and embracing the positive, the easier it gets. At times we all need some constructive criticism in our lives so we can grow, but never let it become poisonous. You're worth more than that!



Chapter Challenge

Have you seen people emerge from life trauma's all the better for it, despite loss and pain? Has this ever happened to you?

Consider the characters in your current work in progress. Which of the above benefits of being resilient, do they most need to achieve their goals? How could you write in people who will assist them in gaining those traits?

Grief

The loss of a loved one, health, job, home, financial security, or a dream is a nightmare that faces us all from time to time. Any loss forces us to ask questions: “Who am I now that this has gone from my life?” “What else can go wrong?” “Why did this happen?” “What do I really believe in?” “How can I possibly cope?” As a writer, if you understand the grief process, you will be able to not only write correctly about the experience of grief, you will also have the capacity to provide inspiration to a reader who is hurting. This chapter is a very simple introduction to grief and what it involves.

Each loss is unique, and there is no solution or comfort which will be the antidote for everyone. I follow the model put together by Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, whose research into grief and working with the dying helped me through my father’s long illness and death. The basic stages in the grief process are:

DENIAL: ANGER: BARGAINING: DEPRESSION: ACCEPTANCE

There is very rarely a neat progression from one stage to the next. In reality, people find themselves looping backwards, perhaps into depression again; or stages such as anger and bargaining can hit at the same time. Stages can also occur out of the set order.

Taking a character neatly through the stages, then coming out fulfilled and happy too quickly may not work well in a storyline. As a very rough guide, it is estimated that it takes two years to work through the grief stages for the death of a parent. That gives you an idea as to how long your story timeframe may need to be. If the character has complex emotional issues and non supportive relationships, then that time can be much longer.

The most effective way to handle grief is to go through the emotions. It is detrimental to shut feelings out or deny them to make others feel comfortable. However, many people do shut down, as it’s the easiest way to shut the pain out. Strategies which assist people through grief include seeking out caring friends or professionals who understand and will support them. The best support is provided by being there to listen and help in a practical way. Trite observations and clichés don’t help.

When someone is grieving, it is not a good time to make important long-term changes in their life such as moving, starting a new job (unless financially necessary) etc. The griever needs time to recover and decide what to do next with a clear head. The challenge can be to get through each day without becoming stuck in the past. People who are grieving often cope well at first and can seem together and stable. It is when the initial focus on the loss has receded into the background for friends and family, that loneliness, feeling unsupported and the true trauma can set in. Life goes on for everyone else, except the person grieving. That is when the full impact of how nothing can never be the same again is felt.

Grief is overwhelming agony which can take more than an emotional toll. The physical health of the person grieved can take a destructive turn within two years or less of the event occurring. Medical assistance with depression may be helpful if it

goes on for too long. Most depression is treatable. Just because someone has experienced loss, it doesn't mean they have to be trapped in an endless state of unbearable emotional torture.

Children cope differently with loss than adults. The younger they are, the less they will be able to understand what has happened and how to deal with their feelings. Their sense of security can be significantly affected. Like adults, they need to be allowed to grieve in their own way and be given adequate time and patience to do it in. They may need counselling.

Some people find it helpful to adopt a ritual they can use to remember and honour their lost loved one. This may be keeping a place set for them at the table on family occasions, lighting a candle, planting a tree or even talking to them occasionally. Grieving people who dispose of memory-ridden possessions too fast can regret it. What is at one stage a painful reminder can later be a great comfort. They need to learn to not be too scared to remember.



Chapter Challenge

Have you seen the stages of grief at work in your own life, or the life of someone else you are close to? Pick a character in your work who has faced some form of loss. Outline where those stages can be written into your work, as incidents and events which display their current emotions. (It can be done simply, you don't need to write a psychological thesis.)

If you are at a loss for how to do this, go online and search for stories where people have written about their grief. Become familiar with what they went through and how grief affects both the small and large aspects of life.

Shock

You are writing about the scene of a car crash. There is mangled metal, the Police and Paramedics are in attendance; but where is the driver of the car? Several blocks away, a dazed woman with blood on her forehead is wandering around, muttering about buying tissues. She doesn't know what just happened. You are writing about a character who is experiencing psychological shock. This post is a basic introduction to psychological shock which will help you understand it, so you can use it effectively in your writing.

There are two types of shock. The first is the medical type that is a life threatening, sudden drop in the body's blood pressure. It's common in serious illness or injuries. That is not what I am referring to here.

Psychological shock is an acute stress reaction which people are thrust into because of a sudden trauma, such as a car accident; death of a loved one; becoming a victim of crime; being caught in a natural disaster: any incident which causes distress by way of inducing fear, emotional pain or severe mental stress. As a writer, if you have taken your character/s through an experience which would trigger shock, how they react to the shock over time, can be woven into your plot and character development.

Shock is actually not the correct clinical term. Mental health professionals refer to it as 'acute distress disorder.' If it doesn't resolve itself within four weeks of the event, it can become a long-term, crippling psychological problem. Once it becomes a chronic problem, shock may evolve into a serious anxiety disorder such as clinical depression, or post traumatic stress disorder.

How people react to serious incidents depends on the actual person. Not everyone experiences a profound reaction. Some will respond with a fight or flight response where they are hyped up and prepared to survive in any way they can. Some people look for a rescuer so they don't have to deal with the situation. Others can shut down, not knowing how to cope. In very simple terms, the emotions go into overload and the subconscious mind decides that the best way to cope is to deal with it later, or not at all. They are experiencing helplessness and unconsciously, they decide that running or fighting is simply useless. It is a reaction, not an action.

Someone with resilience; high self-esteem; a survival mentality; or who is used to taking a leadership role, is more likely to experience a fight or flight response. However, if they are ill, burnt out, discouraged, fatigued or the trauma is outside of their experience to the point where they have no idea how to act, they may slip into this state. That may provide you with an Achilles heel or strong character contrast which you can use to expand the reader's understanding of the character.

Psychological shock can show up as a series of physical symptoms as well as mental ones. It may involve:

Feeling confused;

- Numbness and detachment from people and surroundings;
Inability to remember the traumatic event which has occurred, or only remembering hazy details;

- Some people may become agitated and overactive;
- Inability to make decisions, at times even simple ones; and
- Impaired judgement.

Longer term symptoms can include:

- Sleep disturbances;
- Negative changes in the person's normal mood;
- Avoidance of memory triggers;
- Flashbacks

Flashbacks and nightmares serve to bring back the traumatic memories that the mind just doesn't want to address. It is an internal healing mechanism that can be used to move the character out of trauma and into growth. Acknowledging their content and dealing with the underlying trauma has been seen to reduce flashbacks and nightmares. Continuing to push what happened away, may trap people in a cycle of mental horror.

As this is a broad and technical topic, a number of links have been embedded in this post to give you the information you need. So please, click on the red text to explore the area more fully. I could continue to write about panic attacks and other related issues, but the more you read, the more prompts your discovery will give you. As I have been saying in all these psychology based posts, if your comprehension of the way these emotional states work is accurate, you will write a work of fiction that is realistic and doesn't take improbable shortcuts to a picture perfect ending. That adds credibility to your work which will foster your success as an author.



Chapter Challenge

Write down a rough draft of a scene where your main character goes through a car crash, house fire, or other shocking event. Pay attention to the symptoms above and work them in, (without becoming too melodramatic.)

As with grief, if you aren't sure how to properly portray these emotions, read people's stories online. It helps enormously.

Super-Egos and Insecurity

I hate people with big egos. Let me put this plainly: I really hate, loathe, detest and am repulsed by people whose confidence in their own awesomeness is so great, you itch to bring them down to bitter reality. (For the good of their own mental health, of course!) I've worked with a few people like that. It never ends well.

The other character trait which grinds down my patience is people who are abrasive. They just don't come across as warm, friendly; or at times, even glad to share their planet with any other living being. I am not the sort of person that wants to love and hug everyone, but I do appreciate a certain level of civilised interaction when I have to work alongside someone. Is that too much to ask?

In my early twenties, one of the key figures of our social group was a guy who was Mr Confidence! (Super ego on stilts...) He was moderately good looking; incredibly ambitious; a financial snob in a low paying job; judgemental and he was Going Somewhere Important and Lucrative! He boasted he worked eighty hour weeks, including volunteer time and the older generation around us were heard to remark, that he would burn out by the time he was thirty. I wanted to strangle him many times, but alas, he was tall, I was short... it could never be.

I learnt something critical about human behaviour in the time I spent around him. His confidence, in actuality, was as thin and transparent as cellophane. He was a bundle of complex insecurities. He had a background of childhood abuse and other family complications which he was clearly, going to transcend! However, he was trying to achieve it by following the wrong image of a successful man. He worked so hard at being strong, that his behaviour worked like a magnet: his negativity repulsed the positive people and opportunities he needed the most. I started to feel sad for him. His behaviour bothered me less; it became, "what are we going to do about Mr Confidence? He needs help, but he won't open up!"

Working as a professional, I have come across so many arrogant, abrasive and egotistical doctors, lawyers and managers, I can't count them all. Only that I had that early, formative, experience, I'd write them all off as a pack of time wasters. But now, I look deeper. The angry doctor in the Emergency Room was frustrated with a medical system that stopped him from really helping his patients. He came back and made sure I was as comfortable as I could be. I looked past the anger and saw a big heart. The manager who had atrocious people skills and barked at everyone became a friend. I talked to him quietly; told him how much I appreciated his skills and what he was doing. He too had an amazing passion for his work and he was as soft as marshmallow under the gruff voice.

The more responsibility I see placed on people, often, the tougher I see them act. It is a defence mechanism to enable them to cope with the demands which are dumped onto them. So the question I am asking is, when you are constructing characters who are rough, ridiculous and deserve a good slap, what lies underneath? What private hell are they compensating for? The legacy of abuse? Being worn down by failure or simple bad luck? Look deeper and you will see the real human story underneath. That will be the pivotal point on which you can turn a bad character into a reformed, flesh and blood human.



Chapter Challenge

Think about the people you have met who have displayed over-sized egos. Can you pick traits that they have in common? Have you ever thought someone was humble, just to find out that under it all, they were simply hiding excessive ego-centric self-indulgence? Can you pinpoint what tricked you?

Write down how can you use the subtleties of ego, to build more realistic characters in your work.

Fear and Escapism

Way back before the Internet was born, home computers were comparatively few and we had only the most basic video games. Writers wrote about their characters escaping from emotional turmoil and anxiety in traditional ways. They drank, took prescription drugs, smoked, became workaholics, played adrenalin inducing sports, hid in sexual activities, or became inseparable from the television. More interesting ones, preferably the 'quiet' types, may have turned into arsonists or murderers to occasionally cool down the boiling emotional lava, they were hiding under their crusts.

These days, life is different. There is more to fear and stress about, as we're now constantly in touch with global negativity. Who doesn't know about the Mayan calendar, the London riots or the financial uncertainty in Europe? Plus there is the financial pressure to buy all this computer gear, so we can enjoy the new level of stress from anywhere, at anytime. But look on the bright side, at least with those devices on our credit card, we have a new way to escape the world they bring in! Yes, that is a contradiction. Humans excel at them.

At the very core of everyone's internal lava flow is fear. It doesn't matter what current situation is obviously stressing our characters, underneath they are scared of an event which is going to hurt. The origin of the word 'fear,' can be traced back to the Saxon word 'var,' meaning 'to ambush.' Few of us live under the pressures of relationships, our past, money, careers and our culture without feeling ambushed at some stage. We worry about what will happen. You can't buy your way out of a car crash you can't foresee. Insurances don't stop bad things, it just patches them up! You can't buy a vaccine against cancer, global warming, financial catastrophes or heartbreak. Those events will hurt. What if you can't recover? What will you lose?

If you are writing about characters who are hiding in escapism, here is a little on how fear works in the human heart and mind. Fear is a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness; an uncertainty or dread of the future. It is fuelled by events in your past, knowing that there may be hard or harder times ahead. How are you going to cope? Where are the solutions? Where do you run and find peace? Worry sets in, so you run away: spend hours on social media, play role-playing games, or blast rag dolls into turbines. You have your fear goggles on, or if you're really in a state, you may have your beer goggles on as well. Through two thick sets of lenses, you can't see much of the world and you certainly can't see things for what they really are!

When people become dominated by negative expectations, their fears produce tunnel vision. They become focused on a narrow view of disaster, pain and pandemonium. Hope is filtered out. As we suffocate in insecurity, we struggle to find a secure place where we can rest. It's not just for your main character that goes into hiding either. Now all their loved ones can ignore the angst of family relationships and modern living, by practicing synchronised log-ins into their individual techno-cocoons. Entertainment is the new drug for all ages, that makes it all go away...

Oddly enough, for people who are avoiding fear, we tend to move towards situations a healthy person would run away from in real life. Look at the violence level in many

games. Is there a need to hurt something in some manner to release stress, or is there a deeper meaning? Electronic games provide self-esteem boosting, scored rewards for achievement; or you can virtually perform deeds of daring and win! The message that appeals to us is that there is a way to survive and get some kind of victory over anything that can pull us down! There is a tool to utilise for every occasion. It's right there, you don't need to stay awake at night worrying that there are no answers. If seriously lost, you can Google the cheat instructions or watch the online demos. What a relief!

Fear has a very important part to play in human survival. It alerts us of danger and gets us out of the way. Unfortunately, the number of things we have to fear have increased past many people's ability to cope. If someone is weakened by past abuse, sickness, unhealthy relationships or financial pressure; overwhelm evolves into anxiety, depression social avoidance or phobias.

Philosophy and psychology both seem to agree that the answer to fear is looking your problems in the eye, then dealing with them. It does not involve anaesthesia by any means. You may not be able to remove stresses, but you can manage how you deal with them. You can try relaxation techniques, counselling, or taking positive steps to address the issues that you can change. Avoidance and escapism are to be eliminated.

It is up to you what healing or deteriorating direction you'd like to take your character in as a writer. Even if they don't physically freeze when confronted with a threatening situation, they may emotionally freeze and fail to react or communicate. When stress arises, their internal klaxon goes off automatically and mental evacuation commences. Escape the hazard in any possible way! Remember the fear goggles! It is all distorted. There is no clear vision.



Chapter Challenge

Even if your character isn't an addict, give them some area to escape into. It may be books, music, Facebook, food... anything that allows them to place a mental barrier between themselves and the cold reality of the world.

Consider how you can now write this enhancing detail into your work and where it can be the most effectively used.

Well Intentioned, but Grossly Misguided: Decisions Gone Awry

Human beings have an amazing ability to create and problem solve. We do this on so many levels: in our work, relationships and society. Human beings also have an astounding ability to be fundamentally flawed. Those flaws leak through into everything we touch. Brilliant ideas, corrupted by power, or formed with one predominant view in mind, can go horribly wrong. If it's a mistake you make at work, at worst, you'll be fired. In a relationship, you can be forgiven or break up. If it's a society making a huge error, people can die by the millions.

The negative view always makes such great fodder for writers!

All ideas start out as great ideas once they gain support and momentum. Communism in its purest form: equality for all, was a great idea. In practice, it had some serious problems. Unless you have a magical way to completely eliminate corruption and greed, you will never achieve any pure goal. Equality without complete, incorruptible purity is impossible.

So what does corrupt? There are three main enticers: money, power and sex. If you break it down further, money and sex can be used to gain power. They are more than rewards.

Despite what we see before us, politicians and societal leaders, quite often, never intend their power to be used for harm. The whole idea of giving Governments power is to get things done to help the whole. In retrospect you can look back through history and clearly see where they went wrong. However, when you are working with limited information and resources, trying to do the right thing often leads to the wrong thing galloping away from you. The damage cannot always be undone.

For example, look at the British prison system in the Victorian Era. They had a problem: mass poverty, mass crime. Something had to be done. Locking people away just mixed criminals with criminals, who gained more skills behind bars, then went back to normal life to reoffend with greater foresight. So they came up with a solution. Keep all the prisoners in hoods when moving them; lock them in separate cells; and have dividers between them when in the shared areas so they couldn't see and talk to each other. That way they also had lots of time to consider the error of their ways. Better still, let's make them busy. The answer was hard work! Six months on the treadmill, plus the isolation and surely prison will be so utterly dreadful, they'll never come back. The result: the isolation sent many men clinically insane. It seemed to be well intentioned, but from the outset, not all factors were taken into account and the initiative was thus, fundamentally flawed.

On a smaller community level, there is another example which has always left me scratching my head and wondering why a religious order, so utterly wise, could be so incredibly stupid! In Star Wars, Episode II, Attack of the Clones, you are greeted with the idea that a Jedi Knight should never love. Love is one of the most basic, imperative human needs. Young children showing significant force skills were removed from their family at any early age and trained. Adults could not marry. This allowed for no distractions; no attachments that could be used as weaknesses against them (as illustrated when Luke left his training early to rescue Han and Leia.) The Jedi societal structure was guaranteed 100% allegiance. As we saw, that didn't

work. It created a deep seated hunger, rebellion and mass destruction that went on for many years.

How can you stay mentally balanced and emotionally unfulfilled without love? People from home backgrounds where love needs were not met, are known to become violent, mentally ill and socially dysfunctional. So why such a massive flaw in such an awesome looking system? Power. If you give your love energy to a cause, it becomes what you love and has power over you.

This is what is all comes back to. Power bringing harm when the intention was for good. So when you're writing, don't just write off politicians, leaders, bishops, kings or any leader as just plain bad as they use power. Some have hearts of gold. It's just that we are simply human, thus it often all goes wrong.



Chapter Challenge

Where have you seen the best of intentions go horribly wrong? What warning signs were there, that plans wouldn't work out as desired? Did anyone notice at all, until it was too late?

When you have come up with a good example, list all the details you can remember and then see if you can put the same principle to work in your plot.

Phobias

Phobias are the worst kind of nightmare: they strike when you are awake. No noise from outside your bedroom window will wake you and release you from your nightmare. There may be no escape. They can utterly disable your most heroic character. I'd like to describe a phobia to you from my own experience, challenging the myth that all phobias are irrational. I have a problem with needles. I can watch television programs on surgery and be fine with scalpels, saws etc. but if a doctor picks up a needle, I cannot watch. As a child I was put through 36 blood tests and two invasive tests in two days. Once, I was threatened that if I moved, a needle could go right through my arm. I was only ten years old. After that, no one could come at me with any form of needle.

I will fight you as if you were holding a gun to my head. I break into a cold sweat; shake as my pulse rate rises; start breathing heavily; and my brain goes into a narrow focus, looking for an escape route. For me, it's so opposed to my normal behavior, that it's like turning into a werewolf. I have frightened pre-warned, seasoned Pathologists with my desperation to escape. Hysteria is not out of the question if you try to hold me down. It is pure torture: all for a small, quick pain which is pathetically minimal, compared to my migraines! It's crazy, but it's not crazy. Phobias can be a paradigm.

People are understanding. Many have offered to hold my hand to make it better. They don't realize that it wouldn't help; they'd just become an enemy to fight. It is about safety and control. You cannot distract me, bribe me, talk me out of it, threaten me: I will write off your opinion and leave, because getting that blood test done matters to you, but not to me. I got away. I survived without harm. I won! I have little control over it, despite the fact that I want and need to control it.

So I have a phobia I can partially rationalise. Yes, logically, I know not every needle would hurt me. Then how do you explain phobias that seem to come out of the blue? The lady with a phobia of birds who rarely leaves her house; someone who is paralysed by snakes but has never met one; a person terrified of any form of paper; or someone with a fear of heights when they have never actually fallen? Somewhere, a memory must be laying hidden. Something could have been said or shown to them which instilled fear. Perhaps they had a terrifying experience which is forgotten? You would think a big trauma would be remembered, but it doesn't work that way. The brain can shut scares out as a defence mechanism. The incident that gave rise to the phobia, may not be able to be recalled.

How people cope with fear has no formula. Some will "feel the fear and do it anyway," even if they are in serious danger. Others will hide from a bee that is a few feet away. How do you explain the difference? You can't. That makes fear a fascinating area for writers to explore.



Chapter Challenge

What phobia would your character be most likely to have? Research it, read stories about people's first-hand experience of it and see if you have an opportunity to write

it into your current storyline (or one to come.) Are there any aspects of their fear which you could use in a positive way?

Shame

"When I feel guilt, I feel that I have made a mistake, and when I feel shame, I feel that I am a mistake." John Bradshaw

Shame plays a profound role in personality development, self-esteem and adult relationship formation. As a writer, it is one of the strongest motivations that underlies a great deal of character behaviour. I hope this article is helpful to you in putting together the pieces of your character's psyche.

We've all done things we regret. However, shame runs much deeper than regular guilt. It becomes a part of our identity and colours our ability to connect with others, achieve or be happy. We beat ourselves up constantly as we didn't live up to the set expectations. We're not the person we wanted to be. Instead, we're a worthless failure, with no hope of change. Shame is associated with feelings of being unlovable, useless, unwanted, ugly, inferior, stupid, dirty or bad. Shame hides the real 'me' for fear of rejection and ridicule.

Shame's foundations are, not surprisingly, laid in childhood, then reinforced as time progresses. As children we can be repeatedly told: "You're stupid." "You're lazy." "You'll never amount to anything." "You're nothing but trouble." "I wish you'd never been born. You were an accident" Being caught up in incest, physical abuse or emotional victimisation makes it worse. School can be fertile ground for developing shame: being compared to siblings who did better than you, not being a brilliant scholar, playground bullying, name calling, teasing, rejection by your so-called "friends." It adds up to make an insecure adult, terrified of failure. This can lead to further victimisation as an adult, whether in the workplace or in relationships. "Shame is above all a relationship wound... our identity is based on our ability to form and maintain relationships." (Quote source unknown. Site is now offline.)

It's common sense that no one achieves all the goals they set for themselves, neither can we be everything that everyone wants us to be. Those disappointments in life shouldn't automatically brand anyone as a useless waste. Yet when embedded in shame, at any age, our hearts and minds don't necessarily see them as anything other than additional failures.

Shame is a difficult mindset to break out of, as it is so deeply ingrained in how we see ourselves. We can try positive self-talk and reprogramming, but if we fail to achieve that goal, it takes us deeper into feeling a failure. People move into cycles of shame where the harder they try, the more they fail: then the deeper the shame becomes. Successes are played down and not celebrated. They are stuck in pessimism and learned helplessness, perhaps becoming perfectionistic or a workaholic to give their existence value. That is a heavy burden to carry: perhaps dooming them to exhaustion, disillusionment and breakdown and... more shame.

Healing can come, but usually it comes in gentle stages over time. It comes through achieving small goals and celebrating success. It is enabled by caring, empathetic friends who genuinely appreciate us. It is about learning that making mistakes is OK and that we need to forgive ourselves.

If trapped in shame, we need to change the way we think about ourselves. Healing is being gently opened up to being loved by others and ourselves, and by allowing ourselves to know we are good at what we do. It's a life-long developmental process which involves learning to love life and enjoy it without fear. Our self-belief and expectations of ourselves can improve, no matter how damaged we've been.



Chapter Challenge

What would your character's greatest shame be? What area would they never talk about? Can you use secondary characters or events in your work, to assist them in healing from this shame? Will doing so give you a useful sub-plot?

Anger and Violence

The nature versus nurture argument has always been a focal point in looking at what causes humans to behave as they do. It provides writers with an almost limitless wealth of options on which they can pin the blame for a character's bad behaviour. The latest cause of argument in the debate is the warrior gene. After watching NatGeo's documentary "Born to Rage," it had me taking the argument into another additional dimension: can 'nurture' also include how we choose to nurture what lives within our own minds and emotions? Nurture may be dependent on far more than the influence of our families and friends.

The discovery of the warrior gene and it's use as the ultimate excuse for lashing out, is now so popular it has hit daytime television; changed the course of murder trials (from it's implication as causing diminished responsibility); and DNA testers actively promote their services, so you can see if you have it or not. It's an excuse generator and money maker. It supposedly drives high risk taking executives and entrepreneurs; gamblers; gang members and toddlers who bite, hit and rebel. You can pin that tail on any donkey... until the actual DNA results come in...

According to the iGENEA DNA test pushing web site, the MAOA-L gene, "causes its carriers to be more willing to take risks while simultaneously enabling them to better assess their chances of success in critical situations." Reading around the Internet, you quickly learn that the gene can be considered a cause for aggressive and destructive behaviour; a predisposition towards violence; or a blatant excuse for getting away with literally, everything including murder. The interesting thing is, when watching the NatGeo show, the people who were convinced they would test positive for it (punk rockers, gang members and bikers) did not have the gene. Those who you thought were least likely to have it, the Buddhist monks, tested positive.

So how can you have peaceful people carrying around such potentially lethal DNA? Like most things in life, it comes down to the choices you make in how to handle and channel the emotions inside of you. That is wisdom of choice and self-nurture. As a writer, I am intrigued by how you can use genes as an excuse for what you have done. You can take the added bonus of the clearly stated role that environment and nurture plays, in bringing out socially depraved behaviour and weave it into many plot paths:

- Individuals who struggle to overcome their genetic tendency or who cave in to it;
- People who have the gene who feel pushed to display aggression by their violently focused peers, despite the fact they want to be pacifists who overcome any urges;
- Societies who will eliminate or exile anyone with the gene including whole lineages;
- Ancient or modern societies or financial agencies who glorify such as gene, as they must be dominant warriors with high risk tendencies for high achievement; or
- Armies, corporations or secret clubs with political agendas, populated solely by those with the gene for maximum force.

When you think about it, the warrior gene as a scapegoat is not a new concept. I have seen the same kind of biased thinking applied to people who have a high

testosterone level. They are balding, insane risk takers who have a high sex drive, are career obsessed, crave greater success on the achievement of ambitions and are never satisfied. Testosterone has been blamed for societal violence and aggression... and guess what, it's been clinically shown to be false. This goes down to a basic hormone found in every human being. The traits are again, attributed to warriors, high risk taking executives and entrepreneurs; gamblers etc.

If this was a book on morality, I'd be asking, are we taking typecasting too far? However, this is a writer's space. I am suggesting you research it, then take it to the maximum limit in your own characters for your own purpose.



Chapter Challenge

Your character may, or may not, have the warrior gene, but what other family traits can you give them which can create havoc?

Making Personalities Realistic: The Enneagram as a Tool for Writers

This chapter appeared in the first book of the series. As it is so relevant and valuable, I have included it again in this book.

As authors, we often write using traditional character archetypes that readers recognise. Archetypes we immediately understand include the hero, villain, mentor, outcast, damsel in distress etc. They have an important role to play in literature, teaching us lessons which can also help us on our own life quests.

When I was in my twenties, a book was very popular in my peer group which categorised people using four personality types. Understanding them could solve all their problems! I am absolutely, solidly against any stereotypical categorisation, human beings are too complex! So I did the research.

I discovered those types were based on the ancient theory of the four humours and outright rejected it. I am not alone: in researching this post, someone was talking about how they bought a book published in 1896, which was based on the four humours in children. The original owner had written inside: "Critique: Psychologists say it's unscientific – lacks rigor, precision, control of facts. Nevertheless it sure is widespread in use and application, or trials at it! Feb.29.40. R.N.S."

The four humours are based on the balances of four body fluids: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. They were seen to affect temperament, making you either sanguine, melancholic, phlegmatic or choleric. Of course, the in-vogue book presented it as a more advanced theory. My friends didn't know what they were really reading and they weren't impressed when they heard what the theory was actually based on. Why would they be impressed, even if body fluids weren't involved in dictating behaviour? Who would want to be labeled as, say, melancholic? Do you want to be classed as "crestfallen, crummy, dejected, desolate, despondent, destroyed, disconsolate, dispirited, down and out?" It's not likely to do wonders for your self-esteem. Neither was one theory we learnt in psychology, that typed people based on body shape. If you were tall and thin, or small and fat, you had the same traits as all the other people with your body type. Does this make sense?

Then one of my memoir students asked me to sit through an introduction to the enneagram. I was having a hard time with a co-worker and thought well, why not? It's always good to hear a new theory. I love psychology. I easily located my dominant personality type and it shocked me. I found myself publicly looking into the private parts of how my mind works, that I never wanted revealed to anyone else. It was all there on paper in tale-telling detail and it was scary... particularly for a psychology buff who does not believe in typing. Oddly enough, it didn't box me in, it gave me strategies for getting free, which is exactly what the enneagram is supposed to do. It is about growth and healing

I am not asking you to take all this too seriously. The types are wide enough that everyone will fit in somewhere and truths will be found, as you are instinctively looking for them. I don't live by it religiously or refer to it often. I occasionally pull out my Enneagram notes when I am stuck on a people problem and it does help, but I would still never rigidly adhere to it. Whether you want to believe in it or not, for

writers building characters, the enneagram is a gold mine! It is similar to a road map for human behaviour which shows your basic motivational needs; strengths, weaknesses, temptations and what you can do to balance out your negatives. To increase it's usefulness, there is information online on how to get on with other types which clash with your own. That can be used to create dynamic plot conflicts.

Let me give you an example on how this can work. Let me play devil's advocate and use an intellectual personality as an example. They are referred to as 'the Thinker' or 'Observer' (the five). They are withdrawn, thought-driven, self-motivated, happy to be alone and have a strong need for independence and privacy. Often they don't fit in, in social groups. This is a weakness of their personality type. Problems for fives include isolation, pride, power seeking and their intellectual approach can drive people in the other direction, seeking warmer company! Famous fives include William Rhenquist, Stephen Hawking, Francis Crick, Helen Keller, Wittgenstein, and Arthur C. Clarke.

If you pitted a five up against a seven in your story, seven being 'the enthusiast,' who is energetic, an entertainer and spontaneous, you can cause serious sparks to fly. Place them together in a working environment or unlikely relationship and the potential for depth and conflict is endless.

Another example of how using the Enneagram gives characters depth, comes into play when you are building the personality of an antagonist. Instead of the good guy just being good, and the bad guy inherently having to be bad, now the bad guy is bad because he is a Reformer (the one). He is compulsively motivated by a need to make things better, but he's handled the challenges he is facing the wrong way. It has created fights and barriers, not change. He is out of balance (the enneagram shows you how to create balance) and is a danger to himself, as much as he is to others. I have a relatable, humanised bad guy, who doesn't mean to be a rat and has no idea why people are opposing him, but he can't stop himself. He isn't a one-dimensional, one-task piece of the novel puzzle, who simply exists, as a bad guy is needed for the story line to work.

Enneagram research will also give you lists of ways that the various types can get along with other people. It flags sources of conflicts, how to approach them and other techniques which will have writers in seventh heaven! This is a mystically based theory which has been around for centuries. At it's simplest level it is an excellent idea generator, that you will find useful and intriguing.

No one has just one type they fit wholly and solely into. We have a little of every type in us, but we have two other less dominant types which are called wings. They balance us out. A five will have the wings of a four: the romantic, withdrawn ideal-seeker who wants authenticity, self expression and who can also be deeply empathetic. Famous 5/4s include Sigmund Freud. Fives also have a six wing, which is the loyalist, an attachment making approval-seeker. Famous 5/6s include Charles Darwin, Frederick Nietzsche, David Lynch, and Isaac Newton. You can see how a five could work themselves into difficult situations as they are a deep thinker, wanting to solve problems; are seeking approval for doing so... but can push people away as they are so independent and socially stilted. The five can become one very frustrated, lonely individual, with answers no one will listen to.

This is where the enneagram displays it's potential power to transform. To move away from being a dominant five who needs to master things, is prone to pride and is scared of helplessness or being seen as incompetent; you follow the triangle in the diagram to see what you do to balance. So from a five, go up the arrow to the eight:

the boss. Taking that path, the five has to come out of their mental world to lead and interact with others. One step further, if you were predominantly an eight, the ideal is to go to two, which means instead of being based in power and control, you take a balancing, helping role.

Of course, it is a lot more complex than that. This is a mystically based theory which has been around for centuries. At it's simplest level it is an excellent idea generator you will find useful and intriguing. Just do the test by yourself. You could be in for confronting revelations you didn't see coming!

Enneagram Resources:

<http://www.9types.com/writeup/enneagram.html#FAQ>

[http:// www.enneagraminstitute.com/](http://www.enneagraminstitute.com/)

[http:// www.enneagram.com.au/](http://www.enneagram.com.au/)



Chapter Challenge

Go to an Enneagram web site and take the test on behalf of your character and again, for each of your most dominant secondary characters. What ideas does the mix of personalities give you, that you can add into your work? What insights into how they behaviour functions have you gained?

Suicide

I don't make a habit of writing book reviews, but this particular novel was such an outstanding example of how to highlight an important issue, I want to share it.

Erica James has a novel, "The Real Katie Lavender." I bought it as I have enjoyed all her work. The novel is about identity; has the big romance and juicy family power struggles you expect in a good read... and it portrays the after-effects that a suicide can have on a family. Erica did an excellent job. From what I know of the topic (I have a background in social work), her depiction was accurate. She shows how horrifically difficult it is for those who are left behind, to try and grapple with "why," when no one saw it coming and the answers will forever be unknown. That act threw everyone into grief, questioning their own lives. Who and what do you believe about yourself and those around you? What is really true?

If you would like to read an example of how you can weave a social issue into a book, then this is the book for you.

I have been clinically depressed and suicidal myself. I understand it from the point of view of being backed into a corner of torment. You just cannot find any other way out of. I tried. Everything I tried so that my life could change, failed. I know what it is for the pain to be so great, it seems inescapable. Clinical depression can be likened to a state of paralysis. You can't snap out of it. You are incapable of movement without professional help or divine intervention.

When those days were behind me, I watched a documentary on what happens to the families of those who have suicided and I was shocked. I'd never seen the other side. Family and friends of a victim of suicide, have a high risk rate of committing suicide themselves. That left me with serious guilt. In my right mind, I cannot contemplate how I could hurt people like that. The cruelty of the act struck me forcibly. When suicidal, I had no capability of reasoning like that. You are genuinely convinced everyone would be better off without you. Depression twists your mind like a cult.

These are the signs of suicide to look out for in friends and family. This is directly quoted from <http://www.suicideprevention.com.au/> It is too important to be shortened to point form, or not to be shared.

"The vast majority of people who commit suicide have indeed talked to somebody about it beforehand. Also, it is generally agreed that being forced to promise you will not tell other people what you have been told in confidence does not apply when somebody's life is in danger, so do talk to a professional if you are in this dilemma about a friend. Also, the statement made by some people that those who talk about suicide would never do it is totally wrong!"

Here are the warning signs:

Talking, writing or joking about death.

This usually indicates hopelessness and perhaps significant depression, both of which are important warning signs. Similarly, even if not talking about death, people who talk about life being pointless and having no meaning are also at risk.

Talking about people who have died from suicide.

Every suicide brings with it the risk of “copycat suicide” by those close to the person who died, especially other family members (please keep this in mind if you are thinking of suicide!) Copycat suicide is particularly a risk when a famous person dies from suicide, especially if media reports describe how the suicide was carried out, or make the action seem justified or glamorous. Unfortunately, every suicide really means the illness won again.

Withdrawing or avoiding contact with other people.

It is not normal for someone who was usually friendly to avoid contact with family and/or friends. Not making or responding to telephone calls or SMS messages indicate something is wrong. This is usually a significant sign of depression

Giving away personal possessions.

Why would anyone, especially a person still leading an active life, suddenly give away possessions they used and enjoyed? This is considered a particularly significant warning sign in young people.

Saying goodbye in a meaningful way.

This may be significant, especially if the person’s behavior has changed in other ways.

Making arrangements for after their death.

Pointing out where important papers or belongings are kept, or suddenly making a Will with unusual haste may be significant.

Risk-taking behaviour.

Unusual behaviour for the person, such as driving dangerously, or generally behaving recklessly, may be significant.

Deliberate self-harm or a suicide attempt.

These events indicate great distress and suffering, and there is very risk the person will repeat the situation (perhaps with a more drastic outcome), if the stresses affecting them have not changed or if the illness affecting them has not been treated. Statistically, suicide risk is highest in those who have already attempted suicide.

Discharge from a psychiatric unit.

The early days and weeks following discharge from a hospital for treatment of a psychiatric problem, are known to be one of the highest risk periods for suicide.

Evidence of depression.

Feeling hopeless about the future and having trouble sleeping, are considered the most serious indicators of suicide risk in someone who has depression.

Sudden calmness.

A person who has been very distressed, especially if they have had thoughts of suicide, may suddenly become calm and appear resigned to accepting whatever is happening. This may mean the person involved has decided to stop resisting the urge to suicide, and is calmly accepting that suicide is inevitable, and no longer able to be resisted.

“Terminal malignant alienation.”

This jargon phrase refers to a distressed person alienating all of those around them, often appearing extremely angry and grossly unappreciative of the help they are getting. While the normal human temptation in response to such behaviour is to lash out verbally in return, this may be the last link the distressed person has with support. Instead, try to see their unreasonable behaviour and unreasonable irritability as symptoms of what they are suffering, not as the personality of the person involved. Be patient, and the normal person will eventually return, feel bad about the irritability and actually be very appreciative of what you have done!



Chapter Challenge

You may or may not deal with the issue of suicide in your works. If you do, please put in some of the strategies for resisting the urge to take drastic action. Let your novel, or short story, become a force for good.

Which Mental Illness is Which? Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder

One of the aspects of psychology I have found the most fascinating is abnormal psychology. While living with conditions such as Clinical Depression, Bipolar Disorder (formerly Manic Depression), Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder are far from desirable, the way the brain's chemistry and human behaviour work are astounding.

As writers, mental illness is an area you can delve into to form characters, or use as a plot device. While writing about mental health issues can be very helpful in creating awareness, if the particular diseases are not understood, substantial harm can be done as erroneous stereotypes are reinforced in readers.

There are two diseases which are frequently misunderstood and mixed up. These are Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder (or Dissociative Identity Disorder.) I'm sure you've heard jokes such as, "I'm a Schizophrenic. So am I." The perception that Schizophrenia involves a split personality is completely wrong. The diseases manifest and function in distinct ways.

The best definition of disease I have ever heard was explained as dis-ease. It is something that makes you uncomfortable and cannot be easily lived with. Unlike back pain, or some other physical ailments, you cannot brush it away and keep going normally. That definition encapsulates the effect of mental illness on a person.

Schizophrenia is a split from reality that makes everyday living, work and relationships extremely difficult, if not impossible in some areas. It has a biological basis which appears to depend on brain chemistry. It can be caused by genetics, drug misuse or biochemical imbalances in the brain. It results in a delusional state of mind where the way the sufferer sees things, feels or thinks is fragmented and differs from the norm. It is a complex disorder and there are different forms of Schizophrenia, but the sufferer is still themselves: one person; one set of thought processes and no internal division.

Multiple Personality Disorder is completely different. It does not have a chemical cause. It is created by severe trauma in early childhood which may have come from ritualistic abuse, or repeated extreme sexual assault. It is an amazing defence mechanism, where in order to cope, the sufferer will fragment parts of their personality which become separate identities. Each identity has a function in the survival of that person. Some identities can be wounded; they can be representative of different ages; other identities are fierce to provide protection. More than one of these identities may hold the memories, or smaller parts of them, that need to be suppressed for emotional survival.

As WebMD states: "someone with Dissociative Identity Disorder may find themselves doing things they wouldn't normally do such as speeding, reckless driving, or stealing money from their employer or friend, yet they feel they are being compelled to do it. Some describe this feeling as being a passenger in their body rather than the driver. In other words, they truly believe they have no choice."

Not every identity may be complete. There can be any number of identities and at any time, something may cause the sufferer to "switch" to a different identity without

warning. The oft-repeated example is someone going into the grocery store; seeing something that upsets them and then switching for protection. They are left standing there with no idea why they are in the store, or what happened. If you would like to watch a movie that correctly depicts Multiple Personality Disorder, watch "When Rabbit Howls," but be warned. The movie content is extremely distressing as it comes from the true story of a survivor of horrific childhood abuse.

There is a great deal more I could say about how each of these dis-eases functions, however, I am going to leave it to you to do your own research. We need people in the community who understand that mental illnesses are not faked, exaggerated, or a way to opt out of society. They have treatable causes, but the side-effects of the drugs and permanent nature of these dis-eases makes living with them a tough journey. I hope this post gives you greater understanding. Please, represent people with kindness.



Chapter Challenge

Did you know that there are some mental illnesses which are temporary, being caused by taking medications that negatively interacted with body chemistry? Not every recognised mental illness is permanent and dramatic.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders lists all the known mental illnesses and can be a great resource for writers. Do a Google search for DSMV and have a look at the categories. DSMV also lists problems such as autism and many debilitating issues that children and seniors face. See what you can use in your work, but please, ensure that you do it correctly and give knowledge, not misinformation.

Why We Repeat Past, Negative Behaviour

It's a comforting idea that the past can stay in the past, never to haunt us again. However, whether ours or belonging to another, the past often comes back in ways which are spooky and uncomfortable. Have you heard this song by Split Endz?

*"History never repeats, I tell myself before I go to sleep.
Don't say the words you might regret, I've lost before you know I can't forget.*

*There was a girl I used to know, She dealt my love a savage blow, I was so young,
too blind to see, But anyway that's History."*

I am focussed on the negative here, as no writer needs a 'happy tales' plot line. There are two aspects to history repeating I'd like to inspire you with: nature and lack of self-nurture.

Nature

One of my goals was to research Celtic history and write blog posts on it. Of course, the best laid plans got wildly out of control. I got hooked on "Who Do You Think You Are," the History Channel and anything with a Celtic design attached! The one area which made me sit up and take notice, was how often people who had traced their ancestry saw their own traits in others: sometimes several generations back up the line. To scare me even further, these came completely out of nowhere! There were no family stories, or other ways these people could have known about their ancestor's attitudes, character traits, skills or talents. They were passed down in the DNA, like it or not!

I like to be the Master and Commander of my own life. The idea that we can be unknowingly influenced by great great granddad makes me squirm. Realistically, we all have the choice on whether or not we follow along with our gut inclinations and crazy ideas, regardless of where they come from. However, I can't help but ponder what a great plot line it is to link a dirty deed or an act of bravery to a family trait that comes to light via a serendipitous event. Sharpen your pencils! The possibilities are delightful.

Lack of Self-Nurture

If I had to add another music clip to this point, it would be "I've Done All the Dumb Things" by Paul Kelly. *"In the middle of a dream... I've lost my shirt, I've pawned my rings, I've done all the dumb things! I've melted wax to fix my wings, I've done all the dumb things! ...And I get all your good advice, It doesn't stop me from going through these things twice, I see the knives out, I turn my back, I hear the train coming, I stay right on that track..."*

We have all made bad choices; often, despite our better judgement, we make them more than once. Even when we know we've taken the wrong turn, sometimes it takes awhile before the lesson is properly absorbed into the brain, or we find the inner resources to make changes. In the meantime, we dig ourselves in deeper and

deeper... and to make Split Endz's nightmare even worse, history does indeed repeat!

Our greatest mistakes always make the best reads. Enjoy your writing journey...



Chapter Challenge

Which appeals to you more as a plot device: nature or lack of self nurture? Can you relate to the lyrics of the two songs?

Jot down your ideas of how you could use each of these in your current work in progress, or in the next one which is forming in your mind.

Writing Factually About Adoption

Whether you are a fiction writer who is representing an adopted child or the relinquishing mother; or if you are an adoptee or birth parent writing your life story, these resources will help you. However, be warned that some of the information I am sharing may bring up painful issues.

I am an adopted person. I was bought up knowing from an early age that my mother was too young and unsupported to care for me. Adoption was a good thing and one day, I could find my mother. I have also always been aware that being adopted means I carry some permanent wounds related to being terrified of loss and rejection, and not really knowing who I was.

My adopted family was emotionally abusive. I was bought up with my mother's martyr complex about how awesome she was to take on someone else's child. I have been repeatedly told that I "owed them." I felt like a possession. That is only a small sampling of the damage done to me by my adopted family with their own psychiatric issues. When I reached my late twenties, I finally gave up trying to play happy families, changed my name to one I chose, and started a new life away from them all.

It was easier to do than I thought. The connection to them never really was there. My mother and I had so little in common, we didn't even wash plates the same way. I had only ever bonded with my dad. When I got my DNA test done, it turns out we both have some matching ancestry. He is the only biological match I had in that entire family.

As my family is so dysfunctional, when I did search for my birth mother in the mid 1990s, I never told them. It is just as well. I received an almost hysterical phone call from a complete stranger in deep grief, begging me never to contact her again. I have given her sixteen years to change her mind. It looks like she won't. Knowing from my adoption records what she went through, I forgave her readily at the time. It wasn't until I hit the statistic that 96% of birth mothers want a reunion that I went to pieces. Why was I in the 4% that was rejected? I could have helped her. Why didn't she have the guts to try and heal? She could have been at my wedding. I could have been at her 60th birthday last year.

This is not an easy issue. Parents are given adopted babies not knowing how damaged they are. It is presumed that babies are emotionally undeveloped, thus they'll adapt and are OK. Any child who has bonded to their mother is torn apart by the loss. If like me, they were in a humidicrib for months, or it took time for adoption to go through, the lack of early bonding and affection is a life-long scar. It does not heal. You cannot compensate completely for that early loss. If you grieve any loved one that died, how is this different? Age does not matter.

Studies have shown that adopted children suffer clinical depression, bonding issues, relationship problems, identity disorders, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, attention deficit disorder, infertility, suicide, unwanted pregnancies, homelessness, criminal lifestyles, and will push connection with other people away for safety. Why so much damage from an early bad start? Replacement love is just not enough. Counselling from an early age is not given. No fairy story of "your mother loved you"

is entirely believable... especially if you happen to be in the 4% who are rejected a second time.

If you do find your parent, you are confronted with a stranger, their family, their lifestyle, their mistakes and wounds. It does not always have a fairy tale ending. Often, it goes very wrong or contact is minimal to keep the pain under control. The hope that all the pieces will suddenly fit together is a myth. A child growing up in a their world, may find it a challenge to accept that their biological mother is also in her own world. They can be very different and conflicting. In some ways I am grateful I never met my mother. What if she is an alcoholic and I am part of the cause? How would I deal with that? Would she take her hurt out on me, regardless of the fact that I did not cause it? That Australia Day long weekend was her choice. It doesn't reflect on me, but it's easier to have a scapegoat.

Adoption is no small issue for the biological mothers who were often forced to give their children up either. They have a clinically unique grief which also never heals, and can be made worse by contact with their removed child. It does not necessarily get better with time. 30-40% choose to have no further children. The infertility rate in relinquishing mothers is 170% above the norm. They too experience as many psychological illnesses as their children are prone to; deal with difficulties in parenting subsequent children, have failed marriages and suffer from the shame and secrecy that surrounds having had a child before marriage. In short, it is perpetual punishment. (Source Statistics on the Effects of Adoption <http://www.adoptionhealing.com/ginni.html>)

My mother was a foster child. She passed on the cycle of pain and alienation. Please pray for "Lynette."

More information on adoption is available here:

Adoption.com is the authority for all things adoption. Check out our resources about pregnancy, domestic & international adoption, parenting, adoptees, fostering etc.

ARMS – Association of Relinquishing Mothers, particularly, read this page <http://www.armsvic.org.au/about-relinquishment> www.armsvic.org.au

Understanding child development and the impact of adoption: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent_school_age/parent_school_age_a.cfm

Life Issues for Adult Adoptees from adoption.com <http://www.adoption.com/articles/life-issues-for-adult-adoptees.html>

How babies respond to adoption: yes, they do grieve and feel separation and react – adoptionvoicesmagazine.com <http://adoptionvoicesmagazine.com/adoptee-view/adoptee-view-what-can-a-tiny-baby-know/#.Uey4MxYyH8s>

Nancy Verrier's website, home of the book, the Primal Wound <http://nancyverrier.com/the-primal-wound/>

www.adoptioncircles.net

www.birthpsychology.com – critical site for information, scientifically based.
www.bastards.org – adoptee rights organisation.

Links to a wealth of other information such as search and support services, libraries for research etc from Canada's Forget Me Not Family Society http://www.adoptioncircles.net/cms3/weblink_directory

Mental Health Of The Adopted Child – Origins Inc www.originsnsw.com/mentalhealth/id4.html



Chapter Challenge

Adoption can be a more common issue than you expect and books which are written with it as a theme, are emotive and powerful. Is there a way you can use it in a storyline? If you intend to, please carry out plenty of research. There are many different responses to adoption, by adoptees and their birth parents. Knowing the range of reactions gives you an opportunity to write realistically, without resorting to a stereotype.

Character Growth: Achieving Realism by Using Stepping Stone Transformations

If you have read the plot outline of the archetypal heroes journey, there is a stage where our hero has to face their own fears, sometimes that is their own mortality. This time is the testing ground of strength: they can run; fail and cower; retry then win; or conquer outright with a strength they never knew they had.

This is a stage in the journey sometimes called "The Ordeal." It is about transformation, rebirth and growth. This kind of turn-around cannot happen without suffering. It is a major focal point, which then gives characters the freedom to pursue a new way of thinking, behaving and being. They believe. They can. The struggle was worth it. There is inward peace. Good things can come from bad.

Luke Skywalker's journey in Star Wars: A New Hope, is a frequently quoted example of this rite of passage. George Lucas followed the formula of the monomyth deliberately. He drew on archetypes for all his characters and worked the plot out to convey age-old symbols to a new audience. There are moments of futility, danger, hope and despair. It is very dramatic.

However, in working with people in real life over the years, I have found that the path to maturity and freedom is often made up of many far less dramatic, smaller personal stages than you see on the silver screen. I call them mini-enlightenments. They are checkered by failures, disappointments and face-palm moments, where you could have done better, but somehow, just missed the boat. But that's how you get to success. You fall on your face repeatedly, then find a way of getting through that is easier, simpler and more rewarding.

I break down the process of character growth even further. There doesn't seem to be one big "eureka" moment which covers everything. It is a series of revelations that build you up to become stronger and wiser, the further along the journey you go.

Not all protagonists dual Dark Lords of the Sith, but they do dual fear and doubt. They don't all rescue princesses, but may be the essential listening ear for a friend in need.

If you have never read the heroes journey, I'd like to encourage you to read it, then bring it down to earth in simpler terms. If you are writing epic fantasy, it is most probably perfect as it is and no simplification is required. But still ask yourself are humans really like that? What new dimension can you add to your characters to round them out?

Can one event or quest really change everything? You decide...

About the Heroes Journey

In 1949 the writer, Joseph Campbell, described man's path to enlightenment in his book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces." He studied the great works of fiction and found a pattern which has been written into many timeless stories from all over the world. It involves distinct character roles and growth stages, starting from weakness

and advancing towards being an transformed conquerer. The term used to describe this process is monomyth. I have seen a number of variations of the journey.

For great information, please visit this site: http://www.thewritersjourney.com/hero's_journey.htm



Chapter Challenge

Have you ever undergone a major change in your life that was chequered with failure and took a long time? Do you know anyone else who has? For your eyes only, journal out how it took place and work on using a similar progression, or use the Heroes Journey principles, in your work.

How to Mess Up Your Character's Memory

If you ever played “Chinese whispers,” you will know that information that starts from one person, wildly differs by the time it reaches the fifth or tenth. It's not just because we stink as listeners, it's because the more we try and recall something, the more our brain distorts the memory. When you play a memory game, you are trying very hard to remember and it may work against you. It's not our conscious fault... However, it is a great way to mess with our character's heads. The harder they try and hold onto a memory, the more it may very well slip away...

A few months ago, I decided to find a picture of a favourite television character from my childhood. I knew her name was Serena and she had been in Battlestar Galactica. She had a pretty purple dress with dark purple around the edges and long, curly black hair that she piled up on top of her head.

When I found the image, I was stunned at how completely different the actual picture was.

For a start, my memory never contained a dress that was as revealing as the one in the screen shot. In my memory, the dress had proper sleeves, rather than sitting off the shoulder and they didn't fall in ruffles... I also thought that Serena had worn that dress all the time... No, Jane Seymour's character frequently wore a uniform that upon seeing it, I have no memory of.

Could I have crossed and mixed my memories? In another image the hairstyle I remembered was shown, but with yet another outfit. Could I have added that hair to that dress and for some reason, stuck with that image?

So why does this happen? It's not mental laziness, failing to be attentive to details or old age kicking in; it's how often we rewind the tape of that memory which changes it.

Canadian Neuroscientist, Karim Nader, has come to the conclusion that “your memories are changed by the act of recalling them, meaning that every memory we have is colored by the times we've recollected it before... recalling a memory more often makes that memory less accurate, and that every time you take a memory off the shelf in your brain, you put it back just a tiny bit different.”

For those trying to remember details in court, it's a nightmare: but that problem becomes a tool which is a joy to use, if you're a crime writer. For those seeing a long-lost boyfriend through rose-coloured glasses, it's a game changer when they're confronted by an opposing truth: that is a bonus for romance writers. It's one of those juicy pieces of information, which can become misunderstandings, unfair accusations, sources of frustration and leads to all kinds of stress. Though, don't presume that memory loss is always in the negative. Perhaps your character forgot the best part... What else do they have to rediscover?



Chapter Challenge

Have you every experienced a memory blip like this? How can you use this information on recall to mess with the minds of your characters? Write down five ideas.

Emotions and Character Traits Which Can Be Used Positively

You never hear the word stubborn used in a positive context; however, without it, you are sunk as a writer. It is one of those character traits that gets constant bad press, but is essential to survival in any tough situation.

Thesaurus.com lists stubborn this way: “adamant, bullheaded, determined, firm, fixed, hardheaded, headstrong, inflexible, intractable, obstinate, opinionated, persevering, persistent, relentless, rigid, self-willed, single-minded, steadfast, tenacious, tough, unbending, unshakable, willful.”

Ouch! It's the same as saying that 'stubborn' is made up of two four-letter words, strung together to create an obscenity. However, look at the gems that are in there: determined, persistent, steadfast, persevering. Plus in the face of cynicism, rejections and setbacks, isn't it better to be firm, fixed, single-minded and tenacious? Those are qualities which will stop characters from abandoning their goals or giving in to those who have no right to a final say on their value.

Another word which gets very bad press is controlling. No one likes a character who is controlling. The word brings up every nasty experience we have ever had with mean-spirited, selfish, ambitious people, who quite simply willing to do anything they can, to get their way, despite other's needs or desires.

Have a look at that word again. Wouldn't you prefer that the doctor who is in charge of an emergency to be controlling? Don't they need to push their way through other people's fears, indecision and lack of competence to ensure that a critically ill patient has the best possible treatment?

Negative emotions can have positive sides; as long as there is a balance between them. Grief helps us clear our systems of poison; fear can keep us safe; rejection should stop us from repeating devastating mistakes and anger can fuel us when we need a push forward.

Turn the emotions with bad press on their head and see how you can make them work for your plot.



Chapter Challenge

List the emotions which you think have a positive and negative side. How can you use both aspects to make your characters more interesting?

Controlling How Much of YOU Appears in Your Fiction

As you write, you write out of your own experiences, no matter what the genre. It is a cliché but parts of you are always going to bleed through your keyboard to the reader. Your life is teaching you plot, characterisation, behaviour traits and all the essentials needed to build a fully- formed, believable work of fiction... and that is good.

However, you may not want your novel to be a kiss and tell where your subconscious has dobbed you in, through character personality traits, conflicts and experiences.

Consciousness is the key to control. If you have journaled about your feelings and experiences in life, you will discover themes and events which will enable you to identify what is too much you. Plus you're building a resource you can use to craft a better story. It could be likened to a mini self-service and/or character psychology course. It's a lot cheaper than taking your novel to a therapist!

The act of physically writing out something which has happened helps to clarify events, giving you a new perspective on how and why things happened as they did. It's a great plot formation tool that will both inspire your fiction... and keep you off the page! You are creating your own privacy control options, enabling you to effectively edit out the parts that are too close to the way you think or act.

However, don't become paranoid about self-revelation:

"Let some of you come through. You're obviously not writing a memoir here, but this book is still partly about you: the world you see, the way you think, the experiences you have with people. And trust me, readers are interested in who you are. So don't be afraid to let bits and pieces of your personality and even life details seep into the text. It will breathe a lot of life into the book." David Shenk

May I challenge you to get a journal and start to write about your life, your feelings and how you see the world. Look at how much may have slid through into your fictional work... and what comes out that you didn't expect. It is a journey that will reward you in many ways.



Chapter Challenge

Start a journal (for your eyes only) and write down each day, what is going through your mind; even if it's just as a dot point that you know what it means, but you're not spelling everything out.

Now look at the fiction writing you have done over the last few days. Can you see parallel themes or emotions coming through? How much of yourself has bled onto the page?

About the Author

Cate Russell-Cole is a qualified Creativity Coach and Social Worker. She has a love of the science fiction - fantasy genre and has been writing diaries, appalling poetry and short stories since she was a child. Cate lives in Brisbane, Australia with her husband and two cats and habitually writes everything in Australian English.

Over her career, she has researched, written and taught five creativity-orientated courses; worked as a freelance writer, graphic designer, desktop publisher and has authored ten non-fiction books. Privately, she is a Christian science fiction/ fantasy author who is working on The Chronicles of Mirchar Series, plus a non-fiction study guide on the life of King David.

Other Publications by Cate Russell-Cole

- Write Your Life Story E-Course
- Unleashing Your Creative Spirit
- Prayer Journal Workshop
- Creating and Resolving Conflict in Fiction (Four Dimensional Characterisation Series)
- Building Emotionally Realistic Characters (Four Dimensional Characterisation Series)
- Phoenix Rising: Conquering the Stresses of the Writer's Life
- Phoenix Thriving: Conquering Stress and Burnout in the Blogging Life
- Savvy Blogging for Time Starved Writers
- Avoiding Back Pain: A Simple Guide
- Maintaining Your Independence, A Course For Seniors
- Person To Person: A Layman's Course in Communication Skills
- The Chronicles of Mirchar: The Dragon Tree
- The Chronicles of Mirchar: The Memory Library
- The King David Study Guide